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NSC FOR GREEN, JONES

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MNUC](#) [PARM](#) [NZ](#)
SUBJECT: NEW ZEALAND OPPOSITION PARTY BACKS AWAY FROM
PRE-ELECTION CHANGE TO NUCLEAR LEGISLATION

REF: WELLINGTON 470

Classified By: ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION, TIMOTHY P. ZUNIGA-BROWN
FOR REASONS 1.5(B,D)

11. (C/NF) Summary: New Zealand Opposition National Party leader Don Brash has formally declared that his party would not propose making changes to NZ's anti-nuclear legislation - at least not until after 2005 Parliamentary election. Brash said a future National Government would not change NZ's anti-nuclear legislation without a national referendum indicating strong public approval. Since early May National has debated an internal party (Creech Commission) report that recommends keeping NZ's anti-nuclear policy but amending NZ's anti-nuclear legislation to allow nuclear-powered, but not nuclear-armed, vessels to enter NZ waters. Brash's announcement is an attempt to remove a controversial issue from the pre-election agenda. Brash privately reiterated to Ambassador that he remains personally committed to changing the legislation. End Summary.

12. (SBU/NF) New Zealand Opposition National Party leader Don Brash formally declared June 22 that his party would not propose making changes to the anti-nuclear legislation - at least not before 2005 Parliamentary election. Brash's statement allowed that if National won the upcoming elections in 2005 and formed a Government, it would seek improved relations with the U.S. and Australia. He added that a National government might commission a referendum on changing the anti-nuclear legislation if it appeared that changing the legislation would improve NZ's relationship with the U.S. However, Brash noted that he was unable to fully "discuss the issue with Canberra and Washington" while he was only leader of the opposition. He added that it would be necessary for any future National government to understand whether the United States would be inclined to normalize bilateral relations if NZ retained its no-nukes policy but amended NZ's anti-nuclear legislation to allow nuclear-powered, but not nuclear-armed, vessels to enter NZ waters. (Comment: This was the key proposal contained in an internal National Party (Creech Commission) report into NZ-US relations released in May. End Comment.)

13. (SBU/NF) The Labour government's reaction to Brash's statement was predictable - it accused Brash of raising and then walking away from a sensitive "iconic" issue. However, the author of the internal National party report, former Deputy Prime Minister Wyatt Creech, chimed in to express his public dismay at Brash's announcement, fearing that members of the National Party were more frightened over changes to the anti-nuclear legislation than the general public. Creech contested the notion that the legislation was "iconic" and immutable, pointing to a recent independent poll (reftel) that showed a proportionally larger number of New Zealanders would support changes to the anti-nuclear legislation provided the U.S. did not to send nuclear-powered ships to New Zealand. Creech commented that as people became better informed on the matter, their support for a change to the legislation rose.

Comment

14. (C/NF) With a paper-thin lead in the polls, Brash feels he can ill afford to alienate any potential supporters over hypothetical changes to New Zealand's nuclear legislation. With this formal statement, Brash is trying to remove a potentially damaging plank from his election platform. However, he had been careful to leave open the option that National will reexamine the issue if it returns to Government. Brash told Ambassador privately on June 24 that internal polling points to a slow shift in public opini